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BITS & BITES

Putting his stock in soup

Former waiter is on a mission to elevate food many don't appreciate

"This guy makes the most incredible soup and I can't remember his last name."

Dion Antic, co-owner of Bagel on Damen, 1252 N. Damen

BY MICHAEL NAGRANT

Delano Crawford's soups are that good. After a slurp or two of his Supa Zuppa gourmet brews, a guy might forget a lot: the wretched, condensed, canned glop he's eaten forever, his worries and even a skilled soupmaker's last name.

When I ask Antic who's responsible for blowing my mind with a vegan, curried, butternut squash and Granny Smith apple soup at his new bagel shop (I generally feel the same repulsion for vegan dishes that vegans reserve for leather shoes), Antic says, "This guy [Crawford] sneaks in the back during construction. Lots of people come in with promises, so you think, oh great. But we taste his short rib beef barley, and we're like, 'We'll take everything.'"

A week later, after spending a couple of hours watching Crawford cook, I find Antic's oversight even more amusing.

Crawford, a former swing trader who says he once made \$100,000 in one hour of options trading (he got wiped out in 2000), is one of the most unforgettable people I've met.

Though gray hair retreats across his head, Crawford at 52 is lean like a yoga master and tan like a spring breaker, with the energy of a 27-year-old.

He's made a habit of breaking in through the back door. In 1983, after graduating from Florida State with a bachelor's in finance, he moved to Chicago. Having worked in restaurants since he was 13, he figured he'd wait tables until he got a finance gig.

"I always believed you find the best place in town and you go ask for a job," Crawford says.



Soupmaker Delano Crawford says soup is a "neglected part of cuisine." | TOM CRUZE/SUN-TIMES

So he ambled over to the now-defunct Le Perroquet and asked chef Jovan Trbojevic for a job. Trbojevic told him to return in a few weeks. He did; Trbojevic asked for his phone number. Crawford didn't have a phone, so he gave the number for Fontano's, a sub shop near his apartment in Little Italy. Trbojevic called that afternoon and offered him a job.

Crawford worked his way up to head captain at Trbojevic's private dining club Les Nomades, where he says he served filmmaker Oliver Stone and remembers writers Allan Bloom and Saul Bellow regularly

jousting over politics.

One night, Julia Child was mopping up the juices of a deconstructed Nicoise salad with bread. Crawford says Trbojevic tapped him on the shoulder and said, "The only thing that makes me happier as a chef is to see a distinguished fat man with juices dribbling down his chin."

Trbojevic's lobster bisque was the spiritual inspiration for Crawford's soup business; a chorizo-stuffed corn dumpling Crawford uses in his deconstructed tamale soup is a nod to a cheese quenelle garnish on that bisque.

While at Les Nomades, Crawford bought a four-flat in Little Italy and rehabbed it. After Les Nomades closed, he waited at a string of places, including the Saloon Steakhouse and Fortunato. This was the '90s, when traders "bought 100 bottles of wine like it was Coca-Cola," Crawford says.

After Fortunato shuttered, he sold the four-flat and took five years off to raise his son.

With his son now in high school, he was looking for a challenge.

"Soup seemed like such a neglected part of cuisine," he says. "If I ask 100 people, 'Do you love soup?', 99 people say yes. Then I say, 'Where do you find good soup?' No one ever has a good answer."

Crawford wants to create the Haagen-Dazs of soups. If there's any reason he would be overlooked, it's because he's not the typical rabid foodie drooling over organic produce and aspiring to cook with water culled from virgin's tears or the meat of heirloom unicorns.

He's still into quality — he prefers locally produced ingredients and refuses to use preservative-packed products — but he also is fine with buying from the corner grocery.

He doesn't even make his own stock. He knows this is taboo and doesn't want me to mention it for fear that people will misjudge his food. But that fact just makes his stuff more extraordinary.

His coriander goat soup — a riff on the Indian dish Rogan Josh and a nod to one of Crawford's favorite meals from the defunct Loop spot Bukhara — is layered with hot notes of black pepper and coriander and a floating red wine perfume. By caramelizing his vegetables and meats so heavily before adding liquid, he creates a secondary light stock in his soups.

Crawford mines inspiration from his travels. Caribbean goat plantain, a thick yellow brew flecked with red chili spice and rounded off by the soothing lull of sweet coconut milk, is a nod to the flavors he experienced while in Puerto Rico, where he honed his golf game. He had hoped to break onto the senior PGA pro tour, but says the siren call of island paradise derailed his training.

While the golf gig is one more adventure Crawford has left behind, the soup business looks like it just might stick. If it does, I expect that a lot fewer people — or maybe a lot more who, like Antic, find themselves befuddled by great flavor — will forget Crawford's name.

Michael Nagrant is a Chicago free-lance writer.

SWAP SHOP BY SANDY THORN CLARK

Tomato dishes with a twist

Rustic Italian Tomato Soup — perfect with crusty bread — from June Hamilton of Chicago, and South of the Border Tomato Bean Soup from Red Gold, makers of tomato products, are Swap Shop solutions for B.T. of Chicago, who is seeking unusual homemade tomato soup recipes.

Also this week, Donna Frazier of Park Ridge shares her favorite recipe for Johnny Marzetti (requested by F.C. of Orland Park). And Amy Bellisario of Lemont sends her no-fuss recipe for Crunchy Bacon Coleslaw with peanuts (requested by D.H. of Chicago).

For 6 servings of South of the Border Tomato Bean Soup:

In large saucepan, combine 1 (15-ounce) can spicy hot chili beans, 2 (6-ounce) cans vegetable juice, 1 (14.5-ounce) can petite diced tomatoes with green chilies, 1 (10-ounce) package frozen corn and ½ cup sliced scallions; mix well. Bring to boil. Reduce heat; simmer 10 minutes. Ladle soup into individual serving bowls; top each with dollop of sour cream.

For 10 servings of Crunchy Bacon Coleslaw:

In a large bowl, combine ¾ cup

mayonnaise, 1 tablespoon sugar and 1½ teaspoons cider vinegar. Add 4 cups shredded green cabbage, 1 cup shredded red cabbage (or 8 ounces coleslaw blend), 3 ounces packaged real bacon bits and, if desired, chopped onion to taste. Mix lightly; cover and refrigerate.

Just before serving, stir in ½ cup chopped peanuts.

Requests

Please print a recipe for curried cauliflower. **C.V., Aurora**

I'm looking for a recipe for bread pudding with bourbon. **A.B., Chicago**

Does someone have a recipe for sponge cake made with hot milk? **L.H., Chicago**

Send recipes and requests to: Swap Shop, Chicago Sun-Times, 350 N. Orleans, 9th Floor, Chicago 60654 or by e-mail, swapshop@suntimes.com.

All mail must include a daytime telephone number. Sorry, requests can't be answered personally.

JOHNNY MARZETTI

MAKES 8 TO 10 SERVINGS

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 cups chopped celery
- 1 cup diced onion
- 2 green bell peppers, chopped
- 1 pound ground beef
- 1 pound mild or hot Italian sausage
- 1 (10-ounce) can tomato soup
- 1 (6-ounce) can tomato paste
- 1 (8-ounce) can tomato sauce

- 1 cup water
- 2 teaspoons salt
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- 1 (4-ounce) can mushrooms, drained
- ½ pound macaroni, cooked and drained
- 2 cups grated sharp Cheddar cheese

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Heat oil in Dutch oven. Add celery,



RUSTIC ITALIAN TOMATO SOUP

MAKES 4 (1-CUP) SERVINGS ¼ teaspoon salt

- 2 cups mixed bell pepper strips
- 1 (14½-ounce) can diced tomatoes, undrained
- 1 (14- or 14½-ounce) can chicken broth
- ½ (15½-ounce) can navy beans, rinsed and drained
- 3 tablespoons fresh basil leaves, chopped
- 2 tablespoons fresh parsley, snipped
- 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
- ½ teaspoon dried oregano, crumbled
- 1 medium garlic clove, minced
- ⅛ to ¼ teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil

In food processor or blender, process bell peppers, undrained tomatoes, broth, beans, basil, parsley, vinegar, oregano, garlic and red pepper flakes until slightly chunky or smooth (depending on your preference).

Pour into large saucepan. Bring to boil over high heat. Reduce heat and simmer, covered, for 20 minutes or until flavors are blended. Remove from heat. Stir in oil and salt. Ladle into soup bowls.

June Hamilton

Nutrition facts per serving: 215 calories, 5 g fat, 1 g saturated fat, 0 mg cholesterol, 32 g carbohydrates, 12 g protein, 1,288 mg sodium, 8 g fiber

onion and green peppers; saute until vegetables are tender and onion is translucent (about 10 minutes). Remove vegetables from pan.

Cook beef and sausage in pan until browned, stirring and breaking up with back of spoon. Pour off fat.

Return vegetables to pan. Pour soup, tomato paste, tomato sauce and water over meat mixture. Add salt and pepper. Simmer uncov-

ered for 30 minutes. Add mushrooms and macaroni; mix well.

Spoon mixture into 9-by-13-inch casserole dish. Cover with cheese. Bake for 20 minutes.

Donna Frazier

Nutrition facts per serving: 594 calories, 43 g fat, 17 g saturated fat, 113 mg cholesterol, 24 g carbohydrates, 29 g protein, 1,804 mg sodium, 4 g fiber

food411 BY DENISE I. O'NEAL

Common cause

Common Threads hosts its fifth annual World Festival — and celebrates founder Art Smith's 50th birthday — from 6 to 9 p.m. March 1 at Soldier Field, 1410 Museum Campus; \$250. More than 70 chefs will cook at the bash, including Rick Bayless, Ming Tsai, Michelle Bernstein, Jimmy Bannos Sr. and Jr., Gale Gand and Stephanie Izard. Info: commonthreads.org.

Haitian relief

Kendall College, 900 N. North Branch, is donating proceeds from its Spice Up Your Life Cooking class, taking place at 6 p.m. Feb. 24, to the Clinton-Bush Haiti Fund. Haitian-inspired dishes include fried pork, red beans and rice and sweet potato pudding; \$20. (312) 263-0456.

Presidential palates

The dining habits of our nation's presidents and first fami-



Art Smith

lies, from George Washington to Barack Obama, is the topic of a Chicago Foodways Roundtable program presented by culinary historian Barbara Kuck at 10 a.m. Feb. 27 at Kendall College, 900 N. North Branch; \$3. (847) 432-8255.

Catch of the day

The Irish-American Heritage Center, 4626 N. Knox, kicks off its Friday Night Lenten Fish Fry at 6:30 p.m. Friday; \$12 adults, \$8 kids. (773) 282-7035.

outtathebox BY DENISE I. O'NEAL

TANDOOR CHEF ROASTED EGGPLANT NAAN PIZZA

★★★★

Suggested retail: \$2.99 for 8.9-ounce pizza

Per ½ pizza: 278 calories, 12 g fat, 490 mg sodium, 33 g carbohydrates

Eggplant pizza — the combination might sound odd, but the flavors are perfectly in sync.

Leavened bread is the base of this clay oven-baked, Indian-style vegetarian pizza.

The breaded, roasted eggplant is tender and sweet, the perfect complement to the flavors of basil, garlic, onions and tomato.

Cooking time is 10 to 12 minutes at 450 degrees on the center oven rack. The directions suggest placing the pizza directly on the oven rack.

For a softer crust, you can use a cookie sheet; just add a few minutes to the heating time.

Tandoor Chef Naan Pizzas also are available in margherita, cilantro pesto and spinach, and paneer cheese varieties.

They are available in the frozen food section of Whole Foods. doneal@suntimes.com

